

A Wisconsin Vision for the Future

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Creating the Vision

At a DLTCL meeting in February 2002, librarians and agency representatives who work with ASN gathered to discuss public library services to special needs populations. They were asked, “When designing services for adults with special needs what should be Wisconsin’s vision for the future?” A vision is an idealized picture of tomorrow. They responded that Wisconsin should work toward a future where, regardless of special need, all persons find the following:

- Acceptance
- Respect
- Appreciation
- Independence
- Opportunities to learn and work
- Equal and convenient access to community services

Specifically, they arrived at the following vision.

ADULTS WHO LIVE IN INSTITUTIONS WILL FIND

- easy access to, and will be knowledgeable about, a wide range of library services and a variety of materials for information, education and leisure; and
- the resources, the skills training, and the support they need to enable them to function successfully in their communities following institutionalization.

SENIORS WILL FIND

- the resources, services, and support they need to live as independently as possible;
- a safe living environment and a variety of housing options;
- convenient access to a range of shopping and health care services and recreational and educational opportunities;
- communities sensitive to their needs and that encourage their contributions to, and inclusion in, the life of the community; and
- their cultural heritage respected and bilingual services provided as needed.

ADULTS LIVING IN POVERTY WILL FIND

- adequate food and shelter and access to complete medical care and affordable public transportation;
- opportunities to earn a living wage, with jobs available for those with minimal education;
- support to help them provide the care their children require and the preparation their children need to enter school ready to learn and read;

- sensitivity to cultural differences and acceptance by, and connection to, their community; and
- social and government services equally available and easily accessible throughout the state.

PERSONS WITH LIMITED ENGLISH READING AND SPEAKING SKILLS WILL FIND

- help if they need it, and a sense of empowerment that they can learn and do;
- a strong interagency support system to ensure that people are not left behind and can locate assistance quickly, wherever they are;
- a wide range of educational institutions that offer quality learning opportunities with physical resources in good condition in a welcoming environment;
- a balance of technology and “face-to-face” learning opportunities;
- many opportunities for literacy instruction, such as through employers and health care providers; and
- learning opportunities that respond to each cultures’ needs, with bilingual services easily available.

PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES WILL FIND

- the resources, services, and support they need to live as independently as possible with the same choices available to them as to persons without disabilities;
- plentiful opportunities for well-paying, meaningful work;
- a range of educational opportunities leading to literacy, graduation, advanced degrees, and skills training; and
- attention, respect, acceptance, and equality.

Community Needs

The vision provides a general direction, a desired future. What community needs must be addressed before the vision becomes reality? Library staff and agency representatives determined the following.

PEOPLE LIVING IN INSTITUTIONS NEED

- to have their basic needs met, including adequate nutrition and appropriate treatment;
- a professional and caring staff;
- a range of educational opportunities;
- advocacy for services within and outside the institution;
- opportunities that support positive enrichment for themselves and their families;
- a family and friends support system;
- adequate information about life outside the institution; and
- transitional services—such as job counseling and assistance in planning for the future.

SENIORS NEED

- secure homes, which include items such as lifelines, locks, grab bars, door levers, and a check-in program;
- mobility, including community-supported transportation;
- adequate nutrition, including meal delivery in the community;
- reasonably priced health care;
- convenient access to counselors trained to address senior issues;
- help in understanding “the system,” including legal, medical, and taxation issues;
- community-based educational facilities;
- social activities for fun and laughter; and
- assistive devices such as wheelchairs, glasses, and hearing aids easily available.

ADULTS LIVING IN POVERTY NEED

- quality health care;
- education about proper nutrition;
- adequate income;
- ability to remain home with their infant children;
- affordable quality housing;
- affordable public transportation;
- education about parenting and child brain development;
- English as a second language (ESL) and literacy classes free and easily available;
- transitional levels of support for people entering the workforce;
- more lenient immigration and naturalization laws;
- one-stop shopping for education and social services;
- employment opportunities for low-skill workers; and
- access to information.

PERSONS WITH LIMITED ENGLISH READING AND SPEAKING SKILLS NEED

- community-service agencies that communicate with each other easily and effectively;
- access to and awareness of a statewide shared database of agencies, services, and programs that include literacy services;
- business and industry (as well as private training) more involved in the literacy service network;
- more people focused on literacy needs, more libraries providing literacy services, and more staff with multilingual skills;
- literacy training providers who know where to find, and how to get, funds for literacy services;
- literacy training providers with adequate technology equipment and software;
- widely available low-cost access to a range of library resources (print, programs on cassettes, compact discs, video, music);
- access to more trained literacy workers;
- public-sector workers sensitive to their needs; and
- adequate facilities for literacy instruction.

ADULTS WITH DISABILITIES NEED

- the ability to find and use information in different ways that work best for them;
- more community awareness and sensitivity to their needs;
- seamless accommodations in all facets of society;
- adequate health care;
- opportunities for meaningful relationships and natural friendships;
- reduction and elimination of barriers, especially physical;
- inclusion in decision-making processes that affect them;
- caregivers better linked to disability services;
- more community understanding of the contributions that people with disabilities can make;
- media, school (education), government, and service agencies to be agents of change; and
- more people trained and paid to tailor education to each individual.

Once the vision is imagined and community needs are identified, the public library's service plan can be developed. As an important community institution, how can the public library help realize the vision? Which needs is the public library best prepared to address? The next chapter provides some general strategies for libraries to employ when planning to serve special needs populations. Chapters 4–11 provide background information about eight major groups of special needs populations and give specific service suggestions.

